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ABSTRACT

Several theories exist to explain the differences in the interruptive behavior of men and women. Early research suggested that men interrupt more than women, and this finding was attributed to the dominant/submissive relationship traditional in relationships among men and women. Later studies, however, found that either there were no significant differences between men and women in the use of interruptions, or that women interrupted more than men. Four different explanations of the function of interruptions can be identified: (1) the dominance perspective, where the purpose of the interruption is to control the conversation; (2) an equalizing perspective, ensuring that each participant receives equal conversation time; (3) a spontaneity providing perspective, where interruptions add flexibility and spontaneity to conversations, thus providing a healthy atmosphere for communication; and (4) personality variables relating to interruptions, such as intimacy and social anxiety. (Thirty-six references are appended.) (MM)

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PARDON ME, CAN I TALK NOW?:

A LOOK AT THE ROLES OF INTERRUPTIONS IN CONVERSATION

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PARDON ME, CAN I TALK NOW?:

A LOOK AT THE ROLES OF INTERRUPTIONS IN CONVERSATION

Why would person A interrupt person B during a conversation? Is it to dominate the conversation? Prevent B from speaking? Perhaps A has a need to express some opinion. To affirm or deny. To change the topic or add a thought before the topic is changed. There are a variety of explanations for why interruptions occur in conversations. The most popular is that those who use interruptions are attempting to dominate the conversation. This explanation became popular after early research suggested that men interrupt more than women (West, 1979; Zimmerman and West, 1975). However, recent research calls these findings into question (Conger & Dindia, 1985; Kennedy and Camden, 1982). Therefore, this paper will explore various explanations for differences that exist in the interruptive behavior of men and women.

Interest in the interruptive behavior of men and women has increased in recent years. A variety of studies address the issue along with other aspects of conversational analysis. The interest grew out of the realization that a variety of patterns exist within any given conversation. One of these patterns is the concept of turn-taking. Sacks et al. (1974) have developed a model for turn-taking in conversations. In their model, turns can be thought of as a valued commodity. "For socially organized activities, the presence of 'turns' suggests an economy, with turns for something being valued--and with means for allocating

them, which affect their relative distribution, as in economics" (p. 696). Talk turns, then, are valued aspects of conversations.

Other important aspects of conversations are that, overwhelmingly, one speaker talks at a time, speaker change occurs, techniques exist for allocating turns, and techniques exist for the construction of utterances relevant to their turn status (Sacks et al. 1974). At first glance, interruptions (which result in simultaneous speech) would seem to violate the 'one speaker at a time' rule. They also violate the techniques for allocating turns. The basic rules provide for the allocation of the next turn to one party and for coordination of the transfer to minimize overlap. This minimization is accomplished in a variety of ways. One way is that turn changes occur at transition-relevant places. When a speaker is finished with his or her turn the next speaker begins to speak. Overlap might occur when one speaker is overly anxious to speak and begins before the first speaker has completed his or her final utterance. Techniques exist for each speaker to indicate that he or she is finishing his or her utterance. These techniques result in transitions with little or no gap or overlap (Sacks et al. 1974).

Another aspect of conversations relevant to interruptive behavior is that speaker-selection techniques also exist. The two most frequently occurring techniques are the 'current selects next' technique and the 'self-selection' technique. In the current selects next technique, the current speaker indicates who

is to speak next by directing a comment or directly asking a question to the next speaker. The self-selection technique is used when the speaker does not indicate who is to speak next. Interruptions would seem to violate both of these procedures because they directly violate the 'current selects next' technique by breaking into a conversation when it is not appropriate or by not giving the speaker the chance to select who will speak next.

Even though overlaps and interruptions appear to violate the basic rules of conversation, there are systematic bases for why overlaps might occur. Overlaps might occur because when the self-selection technique is used, turns are allocated to the self-selector who starts first. This would encourage speakers to start to talk as soon as possible in conversations of more than two. These speakers might sense a transition-place approaching and then overlap as a function of wanting to speak next (Sacks et al. 1974).

Overall, the Sacks et al. typology suggests that 1) turns are valued entities, 2) one party speaks at a time, 3) speaker change occurs, and 4) rules exist to facilitate speaker change. Interruptions violate these rules by impinging on one speaker's valued talk-turn, overlapping with other speakers, and breaking rules which facilitate speaker change. The question now becomes why do interruptions occur? Before this question is answered it is necessary to review the findings on interruptions to determine when they occur and who uses them.

We have already noticed that interruptions may result in simultaneous speech or overlaps. Therefore, it is necessary to examine research on both interruptions that result in overlap and those that do not.

Each researcher tends to define overlaps and interruptions differently. Some define interruptions in such a way that both are included in the same definition. This causes problems for generalization. Most researchers, however, define overlaps and interruptions in a similar manner. Pearson's (1985) definition of overlap is consistent with most current research. She states that an "overlap occurs when the individual who is listening makes a statement before the other person has finished speaking, but about the same time as the speaker's last word is uttered, or a word which could be perceived as his or her last word" (p. 198). West (1979) operationalizes a deep interruption as an "instance of simultaneity which (was) initiated more than two syllables away from the terminal boundaries of a possibly complete utterance" (p. 86). This definition clearly provides a distinction between overlaps and interruptions. Other definitions, however, do not provide such clear distinctions. Roger et al. (1983) describes a successful interruption as "an event in which the first speaker was prevented from completing an utterance by the second speaker's taking the floor" (p. 703). This definition clearly does not distinguish between overlaps and interruptions. An overlap could conceivably be interpreted as an interruption as long as the first speaker does not finish his or

her utterance. Generally, though, interruptions are seen as violations of turn-taking behavior and overlaps are seen as accidental starts or overanxiousness on the part of a speaker (Zimmerman & West, 1975; West, 1979; Martin & Craig, 1983).

In the Zimmerman and West (1975) study, all (100%) of the overlaps recorded in the mixed-sex dyads were by men. In a comparison of same-sex and mixed-sex dyads, there were fewer overlaps in cross-sex dyads than there were in same sex dyads. This suggests that men overlapped each other more than they overlapped women.

This particular study, which is cited often in the literature has some startling findings. Of the interruptions and overlaps discovered, 98% and 100% were performed by men. These statistics seem extremely high. The authors themselves suggest that "it is possible that one or two conversational partners could have contributed a disproportionate number of these instances (asymmetrical occurrence of violations and speaker errors) to the overall pattern" (Zimmerman & West, 1975, p. 116). No other research has even come close to these figures. Martin and Craig (1983) found no significant differences between men and women in number of overlaps in same- or mixed-sex dyads.

The results on interruptions that do not necessarily overlap also shows mixed results. Early research indicates that men interrupt more than women while recent research reveals either no significant differences or that women interrupt more than men.

The Zimmerman and West (1975) article has already been discussed. They found that 98% of the interruptions that occurred in their conversations were made by men and that there were more interruptions present in mixed-sex dyads than there were in single-sex dyads.

McMillan et al. (1977) examined the interactions of small groups that were given clues to a mystery and asked to solve it. They found that men interrupted more than women, women were interrupted twice as often as men, women were more likely to interrupt other women and both men and women interrupted a same-sex partner equally. After examining five acquaintance conversations, West (1979) found that men interrupted more than women, accounting for 75% of the interuptions. Their interruptions were most likely followed by the male's continuance and the female's dropping out or both male and female nonretrieval of the utterrances.

A new approach was attempted by Natale et al. in 1979. They examined interruptions in relation to speech and social anxiety. Participants completed speech anxiety and social desirability instruments then participated in conversations with headphones and were positioned on either side of a waist high divider. They found that men interrupt more than women but two thirds of the interruptions could be accounted for by the length of the partner's speech. In other words, the longer the partner had the floor the more likely an interruption would occur. This does not seem unlikely. The speech anxiety rating of the speaker was

inversely related to his/her rate of successful interruptions. Overall, personality characteristics were weak predictors of interruptive behavior, but this will be discussed later. Another interesting factor in this research was the design. The unnatural setting of this experiment reduces the generalizability of the results. Campbell and Stanley (1963) suggest that the reactive effects of experimental arrangements (headphones and a divider) jeopardize external validity, thus limiting the generalizability of these findings.

Another earlier study worth studying examined conversations between parent and child interaction in a doctor's office. Parents were responsible for 86% of the interruptions (West and Zimmerman, 1977). This study is included in this review because it is here that the authors point out that their earlier research (both 1975 and 1977) was carried out on nonprobability samples yet they make bold assertions about communication in general based on their findings. This may be one of the reasons for such stark differences between earlier research and current research.

Current research suggests that the differences found in earlier studies was exagerrated. Roger et al. (1983) found no significant difference in the number of successful interruptions between men and women. However, women engaged in more back-channel cues (unsuccessful simultaneous sequences) than did men.

Wilkowitz et al. (1984) found no significant differences between Caucasian girls and boys but did find that Caucasians

interrupted more than Japanese and Japanese women interrupted more than Japanese men.

Martin and Craig (1983) also found no significant difference in number of interruptions made by men and women in social situations. Trimboli and Walker (1984) compared cooperative and competitive conversations and found that competitive conversations contained more and longer interruptions in same- and mixed-sex dyads. There were no main effects for sex of dyad. Even though sex effects were not found the authors suggest that since some turn-yielding cues are non-verbal females may manage floor apportionment better than males. This should be taken into consideration in future research since it implies that men may need to interrupt more to gain equal time. This follows from the Natale et al. (1979) finding that two thirds of the interruptions could be accounted for by length of partner's speech.

There are several other descriptive studies that need to be examined. Kennedy and Camden (1982) suggest that perhaps interruptions serve a variety of functions. Based on Watzlavik et al.'s (1967) conception of communication as either confirming, rejecting, or disconfirming they looked at naturally occurring groups of highly educated men and women and found that half of the interruptions coded could be classified as confirming. Females were interrupted more than males but females interrupted more than males. There were more cross-sex interruptions than same-sex interruptions, but there were no differences in men

being interrupted by women or women by men. Males and females exhibited similar behaviors before and after the interruption. This is the first study to report that women interrupted more than men. It is also important to note that this research was carried out on naturally occurring groups of four to nine members.

Conger and Dindia (1985) using Kennedy and Camden as a point of departure examined same- and mixed-sex dyads and categorized interruptions as confirming, disconfirming or rejecting. They found no significant differences in the frequency or type of pre-interruption, interruption, or post-interruption behavior of males versus females in same- or mixed-sex dyads. They performed tests of homogeneity before testing their hypotheses. Confirming interruptionns were used more than any other type of interruption. Both men and women were likely to yield the floor when interrupted. Interruptions were asymmetrically distributed in same-sex dyads. Both men and women in all conditions engaged in more interruptive assertions than interruptive questions. Information, hesitancies, questions, lengthy speeches and interruptions were more likely to be interrupted than support or non-support, non-hesitancies, assertions, non-lengthy speeches or speeches that were not interruptions. These findings completely change the way we should look at previous research on interruptions.

First, this was the only research that reported tests of homogeneity of groups before testing hypotheses. Zimmerman and

West (1975) actually suggested that one or two of their dyads may account for their extreme findings. Second, the fact that two studies found that interruptions coded as confirming were more prevalent than either disconfirming or rejecting, and equally prevalent as the two of them together suggests that we should re-examine the basic assumptions of interruptions as dominance behavior. But what are the basic assumptions behind the view of interruptions as dominant behavior? What other possible explanations exist for interruptive behavior? Do these explanations compete or can we better understand interruptions by considering a variety of causes. The rest of this paper will be devoted to examining four explanations of interruptive behavior: to dominate, to gain equal time, to provide spontaneity, and to express personality variables.

DOMINANCE

Gender differences in communiction have been generally explained in terms of the traditional dominant/submissive relationship existent between men and women. "The fact of male dominance--built in to the economic, family, political, and legal structures of society--is also central to language and speech. Language helps enact and transmit every type of inequality, including that between the sexes" (Thorne & Henley, 1975, p. 15).

Freize and Ramsey (1976) suggest further that our culture can be seen as having two classes of behavior: one centers

around dominance and status while the other centers on the expression of emotional warmth. This view parallels the sex-role stereotypic views of males as instrumental and task oriented, while females are more expressive and socially oriented. We value the traditionally masculine traits of independence, aggressiveness and strength which are symbolic of power and dominance. Women on the other hand tend to display nonverbal behaviors which display warmth, liking and emotive characteristics. These behaviors are seen as submissive and place women in a low-status position.

A similar line of reasoning is offered by Kramarae (1981) in her muted-group theory. This theory suggests that the language of a culture does not serve all of its members equally. The reason is because all of its members do not contribute equally to its development. One of the basic assumptions of the theory is that women perceive the world differently from men because of their different experiences and activities rooted in the division of labor. Traditionally, men are the providers while women nurture. Thus, men excel in task oriented communication--because of their responsibility to provide--and women excel in social, emotive communication--because of their responsibility to nurture. But why do men and women perceive the world differently?

Carol Gilligan (1982) suggests that the answer to this question stems from differences in development. In her book, A Different Voice, (1982), Gilligan describes male and female development.

Male development centers on differentiation. The male learns very early that he is different from his primary care-taker--his mother. He must create his identity separately from her. Boys are encouraged to learn to stand on their own, to initiate independent courses of action, and to go their own ways. Their selfhood both arises out of and depends upon their separation from their mother and their first intimate relationship.

Quite different from men, women's development is characterized by relatedness. The female infant identifies with the mother. This connection becomes a way of being for the female. Girls are encouraged to form relationships, and create cooperative relationships with others. They are also encouraged to find value in nurturing and caring. Thus, selfhood for females develops through connections with others and is initiated in the first intimate relationship with mother (Gilligan, 1982).

This difference in development is reflected in their concepts of morality. For men, morality is based on fairness which implies equality, objectivity, individual rights, impartial, rule-guided justice and provides safety for separateness. Morality for women is based on care which suggests equity and flexibility in evaluating situations, needs and people. This view involves conflicting responsibilities within relationships which affirms human connections. Men's and women's views on morality reflect separation versus connection and an emphasis on the individual rather than relationship (Gilligan, 1982).

How does this theory relate to interruptions? If men do interrupt more than women, as the early research suggests, this may reflect their development. Men tend to be individualistic and competitive. We have already established that speaking turns are valued, therefore, breaking into another's speaking turn can be seen as characteristic of the individualistic and competitive male described above. Interrupting would then be characteristic of the 'male' personality. This is implied in the title of the West (1979) article "Against Our Will: Male Interruptions of Women in Cross Sex Conversation." West suggests that male interruptions signifies "male dominance in conversation" (p. 81). But this explanation does not stand up to the research. This newer research suggests that 1) men do not necessarily interrupt more than women, and 2) that interruptions themselves may serve different functions, such as confirming, disconfirming or rejecting (Conger & Dindia, 1985; Kennedy and Camden, 1981). These findings call the dominance perspective into question. In order to further examine this perspective it is necessary to look at whether or not the interrupter is expressing dominance by the interruption and if the purpose of the interruption is to dominate. The first may be considered a personality variable and the second may be considered a structural variable.

As a personality variable, it may be interesting to examine whether or not those who interrupt have dominant personality types. Ferguson (1977) conducted a study to examine the relationship between interruptions and perceived and self-rated

dominance. In this study, fifteen conversations between two women were transcribed. One woman participated in each converstion by talking to fifteen friends. Each participant rated herself with the Personal Style Questionnaire (self-rated dominance) developed by C. Brand, 1972 (see Ferguson, 1977) and after the conversations each of the fifteen friends was ranked by the single conversant in order from the most dominant, bossy and aggressive to the least (perceived dominance). The conversations were analyzed for four types of interruptions: simple interruptions (simultaneous speech with a break in continuity of first speaker's speech and interruptor gains floor), overlaps (interruptor takes floor but there is no break in first speaker's speech, butting-in inerruptions (simultaneous speech where interruptor does not take the floor), and silent interruptions (a speaker-switch non-fluency where the "first speaker's utterance is incomplete but there is no simultaneous speech" <p. 302>). The study revealed that therewas only a weak correlation between interruptions and self-rated or perceived dominance. Overlaps were found to correlate (r=.4662) with self-rated dominance and silent interruptions were found to correlate (r=.4688) with perceived dominance. Simple interruptions and butting-in interruptions did not correlate with either measure of dominance (Ferguson, 1977). We would expect, however, that if interruptions are characteristic of dominant behavior simple interruptions would correlate with self-rated or perceived dominance.

The overlap finding suggests that those who overlap may be high in dominance. However, as we have previously seen, overlaps may result from mistimed attempts to gain the floor. This may be characteristic of the dominant personality. They may be so eager to get the floor that they start talking early. Those who overlapped the most had correspondingly short latencies of verbal response suggesting that they are adept at predicting when a speaker will finish their turn (Ferguson, 1977). The researcher continues to suggest that "simultaneous speech and incomplete utterances may make positive contributions to conversations" (p. 302). Simple interruptions and overlaps may permit speakers "to comment upon topics, before changes in subject matter make those comments become either irrelevant or forgotten" (p. 302). This research failed to demonstrate a strong relationship betweeen dominant personalities and interruptions. More research is needed to confirm these findings, not only on just women but on men and women.

The next aspect to be discussed is the structural aspect of the interruption. Above, we noted that interruptions may function as a means of permitting commentary rather than dominating the conversation. This leads us to the second explanation of interruptive behavior--to provide equal time.

EQUAL TIME

In our discussion of the Natale et al. (1979) study we noted that nearly two thirds of the interruptions could be accounted for by length of the partner's speech. When the partner spoke for long periods of time the other partner was more likely to interrupt. The assumption behind interruptions as dominant behavior is that interruptions serve to minimize the role of the interruptee (Markel et al., 1976). If this were the case we would expect that the interrupter would end up with more talk time over the entire conversation. But this is not necessarily the case. Recent findings, like the one noted above, suggest that a major factor involved in interruptive behavior is the length of the partner's speech (Natale et al. 1979; Conger and Dindia, 1985). In fact, in the McMillan et al. (1977) and Natale et al., (1979) studies, where the men interupted more than women, therewere no significant differences in amount of talk time between men and women across groups. These findings suggest that interruptions serve to equalize speech time.

Reinforcement for this belief can be found in the Conger & Dindia (1985) study. They found that for both men and women, interruptions tended to result in the interrupter maintaining the floor. This suggests that since the speaking turn is valuable, the interrupter wants to make sure s/he gets her/his turn to speak. This turn may not necessarily serve to minimize the role of the other. Instead it may serve to equalize the role of each speaker in the interaction, ensuring that each receives the valued (Sacks et al., 1974) talk time.

One might still wonder that if interruptions are not to be considered as dominant behavior then why were men found to interrupt women more in the earlier studies. The Trimboli and Walker (1984) article might have an answer. As we noted earlier, they suggested that since some floor apportionment cues are non-verbal, women might manage floor apportionment better than males. If this were so, then men may have felt it necessary to interrupt to gain the floor since they were not as adept at noticing non-verbal floor apportionment cues. The assumption is that women are more adept at recognizing non-verbal cues. This may be changing as our society places more importance on androgynous characteristics in both men and women. Men may be becoming more adept at recognizing non-verbal cues
and not necessarily need to interrupt to get the floor. The question for future research should now become what percentage of men's and women's interruptions serve as interaction equalizers or interaction disequalizers.

SPONTANEITY

In light of recent findings we need to consider other explanations of interruptive behavior. An interesting line of research has been developing in the health field. This research suggests that interruptions along with pauses and laughter are

characteristic of healthy (as opposed to clinic) families (Mishler & Waxler, 1968; Lennard, Beaulieu, & Embrey, 1965; and Riskin and Faunce, 1970). Interruptions may add flexibility, spontaneity and even personalization to conversations. Early research indicates that normal family interaction is characterized by high frequencies of interruptions and simultaneous speech (Winter & Ferreira, 1969; Parsons & Alexander, 1973).

In their study, Mishler & Waxler (1968) viewed interruptions as a direct means of person control. They were 'clearly' seen as a way to maintain control over others. Questions, on the other hand, also maintain control but they are seen as an indirect mode of control. The researchers found that normal families (families with sons or daughters who are viewed as normal as opposed to being diagnosed as schizophrenic) choose to use the direct strategy of interrupting more than the schizophrenic families (families with a child diagnosed as schizophrenic) who more often chose the indirect mode of questioning. "In both the male and female normal familes rates of interruptions were high and relative success of this strategy was low for all members of the family" (p. 160). They concluded by suggesting that speech disruptions introduce flexibility into conversational interactions.

O'Connor & Stachowiak (1971) compared the interactions of three different family types: families with an unusually high adjusted child, unusually low adjusted child and families with a

mentally retarded child. The low adjusted families scored significantly lower in interruptions than both the family groups with high adjusted and mentally retarded children. In other words, the healthier families used more interruptions than did the less healthy families.

Another interesting study examined couple power structure and interruptions. Hurley (1981) hypothesized that the frequency of interruptions would be inversely related to a couple's conflict score. This would mean that couples with a high conflict score (unequal power structure) would have a low frequency of interruptions while couples with a low conflict score would have a high rate of interruptions. This hypothesis was based on the research noted above that suggests normal families tend to exhibit a high rate of interruptions. The author assumed that couples with a low conflict score (and therefore an equal balance of power) were normal healthy families while couples high in conflict (unequal power structure) were seen as less healthy families. (We will see later that this assumption is questionable.)

The hypothesis was not supported ($r=-.03$). There was no relationship between the number of interruptions used and the power structure of the participating couples. Conceptually, the hypothesis was appropriate. Couples high in conflict would be considered less healthy than couples low in conflict. The problem is the operationalization of conflict. Hurley points out that conflict that results from unequal power in a marital dyad

has an adverse effect on the family system and this has been demonstrated by Bowen (1976), Haley (1963), and Satir (1967). One cannot assume, however, that all unequal power structures result in conflict. For years the traditional family structure was characterized by unequal power structures. Men dominated most marriages (Pearson, 1985). This was the norm not the exception.

This research is important for two reasons: first, it reinforces previous research that indicates that there is little correlation between dominant individuals and interruptions, only this research examined interruptions by couple rather than individual; and second, it provides an interesting approach to the role of interruptions in families.

Along similar lines, Morton (1978) compared the communication between spouses and strangers. The purpose was to compare intimacy and reciprocity. The interesting finding was that conjoint speech was characteristic of the advanced and well-functioning relationships. "It is through the interruptions, rapid-fire exchanges, and simultaneous talking so characteristic of well-developed relationships that personalization takes place" (p. 80). The interruptions in these conversations functioned to increase the intimacy in the dialogue.

This section examined various research articles that were concerned with interruptions in healthy families. They indicate that healthy families use more interruptions and simultaneous

speech than non-healthy or less-healthy families. The interruptions are seen as adding spontaneity, flexibility and personalization to conversations. In this respect, interruptions play an altogether different role in conversations than dominance and equilization. Another view of interruptions centers around personality variables.

PERSONALITY VARIABLES

As noted earlier, the key to understanding interruptions may not lie in any single explanation for their use but in a combination of several explanations. We have already noted several personality variables while discussing the previous explanations. It may be useful to review them here.

Ferguson (1977) found that there was only a weak relationship between interruptions and dominant personalities. Only overlaps and silent-interruptions correlated with either self-rated or perceived dominance. Hurley (1981) found that in couples with an unequal power structure (one spouse more dominant than the other) there was no correlation with interruptions. Morton (1978) found that intimacy correlated strongly with interuptions. We have also suggested that interruptions may serve to express the opinion of the interrupter but, we have not seen how this correlates to personality. This is what we will examine next.

Very little research has specifically looked at personality variables and interruptions. One of the few studies that does look at these variables has already been discussed. Natale et al. (1979) examined the relationship between personality variables and interruptions. The most significant finding was that the amount of speaking time of the partner was a strong positive factor. However, there were several other significant findings that were not as strong as this. There was no relationship between the conversational partner's personality and speaker's propensity to interrupt. The speaker's desire for social approval was positively related to use of interruptions. The use of back channel responses was significantly related to one's overall rate of successful interruptions. The speaker's general speech anxiety was inversely related to his or her rate of successful interruptions. Those high in social anxiety were less likely to persist with interruptions.

The high correlation between intimacy and interruptions may explain why those with a high need for social approval interrupt more. Further, some interruptions are committed for the purpose of reinforcing the listening role. The fear of negative evaluation was positively related to the use of back channel cues. Another interesting finding was that "the more confident the partner felt about speaking, the higher the proportion of successful interruptions by the other subject" (p. 875). One explanation may be that the partner displays a positive attitude

about interpersonal communication and thus gives the partner more confidence to attempt speaker switches (Natale, 1979).

These findings suggest that there may be relationships between personality characteristics and interruptive behavior. Indeed, as suggested in the opening paragraph, interruptions may permit an individual to comment out of turn as a dimension of that person's need for social approval. A confident partner might increase the potential for the addition of flexibility and spontaneity to a conversation through interruption.

One should always be wary of generalizing from one study to the whole population especially when we have already discussed the reactive arrangements present in this study. However, this study does indicate that there is potential for research into the relationships between personality characteristics and interruptions.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined interruptions and why they occur in conversations. Early research suggested that men interrupt more than women. Several studies corroborated this finding. This finding was attributed to the dominant/submissive relationship traditional in relationships among men and women. Later studies, however, cast doubt on this view. They found that either there

were no significant differences between men and women in the use of interruptions or that women interrupted more than men.

These findings along with other considerations of the function of interruptions led to other explanations for their use. Four explanations were presented and discussed. These explanations included the dominance perspective, an equalizing perspective, a spontaneity providing perspective and personality variables. We have seen that interruptions may be looked at as equalizing the time allocated to each speaker during a conversation. That is, interruptions may serve as a device to insure that each participant gets an equal share of 'valued' talk turns. We have also noted that interruptions are characteristic of healthy as opposed to less-healthy families. Researchers suggest that interruptions serve to add flexibility and spontaneity to conversations, thus providing a healthy atmosphere for communication. Finally, we have noted that some personality variables may be related to interruptions (intimacy and social anxiety) while others are not (dominance and characteristics of receiver).

Future research needs to keep all of these variables in mind while investigating the role of interruptions in conversation. Too narrow a view may not provide an adequate conceptual framework for such promising research.

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